Expressing your ideas and using sources effectively: advice and strategies for students

**What is the purpose of writing essays or reports?**

* To present a clear position on a particular topic.
* To show you are able to find and use evidence/reasons/data to support your ideas.

When writing academic papers or essays, you often need to refer to evidence or research from other sources. The term ‘voice’ is used to differentiate between your ideas, or your voice, and that of other authors.

An understanding of the use of academic voice in writing can help in avoiding plagiarism and increase your academic writing skill.

Other voices

* support your ideas
* provide evidence, examples, data
* must be labelled and referenced.

Student voice

* introduces new ideas
* presents arguments
* states conclusions.

As much as there are arguments that support genetically modified vaccines, there are also many controversies associated with them. *The first issue is that too much vaccine can lead to tolerance of diseases rather than immunity, but at the same time, too little vaccine may not provoke an effective immune response (Explore Biotech, 2004)*. There are many doubts people have with banana vaccines, as they question*: How can the amount of vaccination intake be controlled and monitored? How can vaccines produced in plants be safe? How effective are these banana vaccinations? (Cook, 2004).*

**Whose ideas?**

**Whose words?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Student Text 2** | **Whose voice?** |
| 1One idea for facilitating the spread of vaccines is through edible vaccines in genetically modified fruits, such as bananas.2Using bananas is ideal as they do not reproduce, so their genes would not escape into the environment. 3Bananas are eaten by children and adults, and by consuming the modified bananas, people are also consuming the vaccine (Biotech 2004). | Sentence 1:  Sentence 2:  Sentence 3: |

**Task 1**

Consider the following excerpts from student essays.

* Identify the student voice, direct voices, indirect voices and external voices.
* Which texts clearly show the different voices?
* Which text does not distinguish between the different voices effectively?

(Answers can be found on the final page.)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Student Text 1** | **Whose voice?** |
| 1The Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) (Wang et al., 2006) highlights the relationship between the economic growth and environmental pollution. 2Specifically, the relationship between the environmental degradation and the economic growth could be described by an inverted U-shape (Yang et al., 2003). 3In other words, the economic growth would increase environmental pollution in developing countries (i.e. an economy that is only developed at a basic level). 4However, there would be a negative association between the economic growth and the pollution in developed nations. 5That is to say, if an economy has developed to a certain point that contributes to economic growth, it consequently will increase environmental degradation (Yang et al., 2011). 6It has been established that Shanghai is one of the big cities in China that trade globally in the 1930s (Yaoyao, 2012). 7It is expected that with economic growth an increase in environmental degradation could be the next projected phenomenon that the government will have to face. | Sentence 1: *Example: External voice (Wang et al.)*  Sentence 2:  Sentence 3:  Sentence 4:  Sentence 5:  Sentence 6:  Sentence 7: |

**Task 2**

Read the following three excerpts from student essays.

* What is the difference between the three texts?
* Which is the most appropriate? Why?
* Which might be accused of copying ideas or words from other authors?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Student Text 3** | **Whose voice?** |
| 1There is a strong connection between maths and art. 2Artists, such as Escher, have used maths to great extent when creating their work. 3Escher used maths to express ideas in his artwork, in fact his “…work contains a multitude of connections between mathematics and art” (Velochová 2010). 4Ideas such as infinity and paradox, which are markedly mathematical terms, are used in his artworks; an example of which is one of his most famous works *Relativity* (Schattschneider 2003). 5Casselmann (n.d.) also suggests that the use of mathematical concepts is evident in his series of artworks entitled ‘Circle Limits’. 6Mathematical concepts also assist artists in increasing their accuracy in designing life-like artworks. 7It has been suggested that Da Vinci must have considered the form of vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines when designing his work *The Last Supper*. 8This idea of perspective, or an awareness of the Gergonne Point, was used in the Renaissance to show depth in paintings (Gish & Ribando 2003, p. 18). 9The works of Escher and Da Vinci are examples of the interconnectivity between maths and art. | Sentence 1:  Sentence 2:  Sentence 3:  Sentence 4:  Sentence 5: *Example: Indirect voice (Casselmann n.d.)*  Sentence 6:  Sentence 7:  Sentence 8:  Sentence 9: |

|  |
| --- |
| **Student Text 1** |
| Glaciers are powerful forces in shaping our mountain landscapes. The erosive power of flowing ice has scoured and gouged the peaks of mountains such as the Swiss Alps and carved the deep glacial troughs which traverse across the landscape. There is an abundance of evidence of erosion in the Swiss Alps, including pyramidal peaks such as the Matterhorn and glacial troughs such as that at Lauterbrunnen. Furthermore, the Alpine landscape is littered with many other features of glacial erosion, for example, cirques, arêtes and hanging valleys (Greig 2014). |

|  |
| --- |
| **Student Text 2** |
| Glaciers are powerful forces in shaping our mountain landscapes. The erosive power of flowing ice has scoured and gouged the peaks of mountains such as the Swiss Alps and carved the deep glacial troughs which traverse across the landscape. There is an abundance of evidence of erosion in the Swiss Alps, including pyramidal peaks such as the Matterhorn and glacial troughs such as that at Lauterbrunnen (Greig 2014, p.1). Furthermore, the Alpine landscape is littered with many other features of glacial erosion, for example, cirques, arêtes and hanging valleys (Greig 2014, p.4). |

|  |
| --- |
| **Student Text 3** |
| Glaciers are powerful forces in shaping our mountain landscapes. The erosive power of flowing ice has scoured and gouged the peaks of mountains such as the Swiss Alps and carved the deep glacial troughs which traverse across the landscape. There is an abundance of evidence of erosion in the Swiss Alps, including pyramidal peaks such as the Matterhorn and glacial troughs such as that at Lauterbrunnen. Furthermore, the Alpine landscape is littered with many other features of glacial erosion, for example, cirques, arêtes and hanging valleys |

**Task 3**

Consider one of your pieces of writing.

* Identify the different voices used.
* Is your voice clear? Is it being used to introduce new ideas and state conclusions?
* Are the other voices clearly labelled and referenced?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Answers** | | |
| **Task 1** | | |
| **Student Text 1** | **Student Text 2** | **Student Text 3** |
| Sentence 1: *Example: External voice (Wang et al. 2006)*  Sentence 2: External voice (Yang et al. 2003)  Sentence 3: Student voice  Sentence 4: Student voice  Sentence 5: External voice (Yang et al. 2011)  Sentence 6: External voice (Yaoyao 2012)  Sentence 7: Student voice | Sentence 1: ?  Sentence 2: ?  Sentence 3: External voice (Biotech 2004) | Sentence 1: Student voice  Sentence 2: Student voice  Sentence 3: Direct voice (Velochová 2010)  Sentence 4: External voice (Schattschneider 2003)  Sentence 5: *Example: Indirect source (Casselmann n.d.)*  Sentence 6: Student voice  Sentence 7: Student voice  Sentence 8: External voice (Gish & Ribando 2003, p. 18)  Sentence 9: Student voice |
| Student Text 1 and 3 clearly distinguish between the different voices. The student voice is clear and the other voices are labelled and referenced accurately.  Student Text 2 is the least effective at distinguishing between voices. As the reference is only at the end, we assume that the first two sentences are the student voice. However, since sentences 1 and 2 provide examples and evidence, they are actually from the source and should be labelled also. This would be an example of potential plagiarism as the student did not reference the source accurately. | | |
| **Task 2** | | |
| Student text 2 is the most appropriate. The student voice is clear and introduces the topic. The evidence (name of peaks and features of erosion) is clearly referenced.  Student text 1 is not appropriate. It is unclear whether the whole paragraph is from Greig or only the last sentence. The reader may assume that the first sentences are the student’s ideas, but would be questioning how the student knows the names of the peaks and from where the student got the information. This is an example of using ideas from another author and the reader believing that they are yours.  Student text 3 is also not appropriate. There is no labelling or referencing of sources, so the reader would assume that everything in this paragraph is the student‘s ideas. As most of the ideas actually come from another source, the student may be questioned about copying ideas from other authors. This may be an example of unintentional plagiarism simply because the voices have not been clearly labelled. | | |